

# Filing Made Easy

## FileMaker Pro 6/ FileMaker Mobile 2.1

### FileMaker Inc.

(800) 325-2747

www.filemaker.com

Price (Pro 6): \$299

Price (Mobile 2.1): \$49

Windows 98/Me/NT 4.0 (Service Pack 6) /2000/XP

Check Web site for system requirements for

FileMaker Mobile 2.1.

*Reviewed by Steven Schmidt, shareholder, director and president of Business & Technology Law, Albuquerque, N.M.*

FileMaker Inc. released a new *à la carte* suite of FileMaker relational database products including FileMaker Pro 6, FileMaker Pro 6 Unlimited, FileMaker Developer 6, FileMaker Server and FileMaker Mobile 2.1.

FileMaker Pro Server is compatible with FileMaker 5, 5.5 and 6, allows up to 250 simultaneous guests per server, and can host up to 125 database files.

The database needs of almost any law firm are met with the combination of these releases. If your law firm mixes PCs and Macintosh computers (Mac OS and OS X), FileMaker is the only mainstream relational database option running on both platforms that I am aware of, without employing Open Database Connectivity.

Windows and Macintosh versions are sold as separate packages. FileMaker Server also works with Red Hat Linux. FileMaker Mobile 2.1 is ported for the Palm Operating System and the Pocket PC.

FileMaker is extremely intuitive. Database fields, along with their types and properties are created in a list. A default layout is created automatically, saving at least one step as compared with other database programs. You can create other layouts for data entry, reports and more.

You can switch between records or layouts with a click of the mouse. If you regularly view two or three layouts of a database, you can create buttons to switch between them. You don't need to know programming of any kind to do this, and the documentation contains an excellent tutorial, which will take you through most of the program features you will use regularly.

A tutorial using a sample file and a view of the end product are included on the installation CD.

However, the real fun starts once you create the database and look at your first

planned layout. Customizing your layout is more than just mere aesthetics. Customization greatly increases the databases' usability by making it easier to enter, view and find data.

Placing database fields in a visually aesthetic manner requires no more than dragging the field and its modifiable text description to wherever you want it.

The same can be said for resizing the fields. Changing the background of fields makes it much easier to view a screen crowded with data.

You also can add scripts (think of them as macros), which accomplish repetitive tasks quickly, especially if you assign the script to a button. You can do a lot with scripts, but learning FileMaker's proprietary scripting is more complex, although

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not terribly challenging. It's well documented, if you are willing to take the time necessary to study it.

Modification of the database is also easy compared to other database programs. In the database you want to modify, just click "Define Fields" as you did when you created the database. The same list comes up. Create the new fields and drag them up to where you want them. Switch to your layouts and put the fields where you want them.

Unlike other databases currently available on the market, your tab order (where the tab key takes you in the database) follows your modification, not the order in which the fields were created. This saves you the trouble of revising the tab order in a separate step.

Databases can be created on templates. There are business, education and home categories of templates. Within each category are more than 30 templates such as contact management, time cards, To-Do lists and more, and you can modify the database modeled on a template.

FileMaker's Instant Web Publishing remains the easiest way to share your data-

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base on your intranet or on the Internet.

FileMaker Pro 6 allows up to 10 users (actually 10 Internal Protocol addresses) per 12 hours to access the data. This is fine for small workgroups. For unlimited access, you need FileMaker Pro 6 Unlimited. If you want to create runtime versions of FileMaker Pro, you need FileMaker Developer 6.

New in Version 6 is the ability to import and export data employing Extensible Markup Language (XML). This positions FileMaker to take advantage of Microsoft .Net XML Web services as they become more prevalent.

This capability allows you to import pictures and videos directly from digital sources into your databases, and you can do so in batches rather than just one at a time. So your document database can contain images of the documents, and your witness database can contain photos of the witnesses and videos of evidence described.

FileMaker Mobile 2.1 allows you to take your data with you on a device running Palm OS or on a Pocket PC (not tested). You specify the fields containing the data you want with you. You can add, delete and modify the data on the Palm. When you get back to the office, you can synchronize the data with HotSync or with Active Synchron via Pocket PC.

On the negative side, the techies in your firm probably will wish for Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) support, not necessarily because they can't do everything they want with the capabilities of the program, but because they already know VBA. **LOG**

## Closing Argument

**Pros:** It's intuitive, powerful, easy to use and customizable. You can share data via ODBC and XML, and it's compatible with Windows, Macintosh and RedHat Linux.

**Cons:** There is no VBA support.

**Verdict:** FileMaker is a great database for the non-techies and computer-savvy alike. I recommend it.

**REVIEW POLICY:** Reviews are conducted by practicing attorneys and other legal professionals using the actual products on their systems. Vendors are NEVER allowed access to reviews before publication. Reviewers are selected by the magazine editors.

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